

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0036
(916) 319-2036
FAX (916) 319-2136

DISTRICT OFFICE
709 W. LANCASTER BLVD.
LANCASTER, CA 93534
(661) 723-3368
FAX (661) 723-6307

DISTRICT OFFICE
23920 VALENCIA BLVD.
SUITE 250
SANTA CLARITA, CA 91355
(661) 259-4516
FAX (661) 259-3116

Assembly
California Legislature



GEORGE RUNNER
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- SELECT COMMITTEE ON AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

August 31, 2002

The Honorable Dede Alpert
Chair, Joint Committee to Develop
A Master Plan for Education
1020 N Street, Suite 560
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairwoman Alpert,

I would like to commend you for your dedication to improving education in California. I know that you and I are both seeking to do what we think is best for California students, as we endeavor to create a Master Plan that will address the needs of our state for decades to come. In that respect, I have carefully reviewed the report, solicited input from local education leaders in my district, and talked with community members at local town halls. While there are good attributes of the plan, I have many concerns that I would like to share.

Adequate Funding

The proposed finance model included in the Master Plan is very troubling to me. I am primarily wary of establishing a state commission to determine adequate funding. First, it is unclear how one even begins to define "adequacy." Districts often face special, unique challenges that would make "adequacy" a poor paradigm. What may be adequate for one district may be considered inadequate for other districts. Even with the proposed categorical adjustments, I believe that the education system is too complex and has too many variables to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

Moreover, I do not believe that there is a strong enough focus on ensuring that expenditures are efficient and will result in higher student performance. It would be easy and tempting for the proposed California Quality Education Commission (CQEC) to throw money at problems and hope that things improve, and I have strong concerns that the Commission would ultimately lead us in that direction, especially for low-performing schools. There needs to be a clear, demonstrable link between funding increases and performance improvement, and a greater emphasis on results. It is absolutely critical that the relative return on our investment be included as a primary consideration. This return should also be consistent with what other states are accomplishing. Some states manage to achieve more with less money, and we should determine how they do it, emulate their efficiency, and hold our schools to the same standards.

While our schools do face unique challenges, we need to make sure that we do not fall into the trap of equating more money with greater student performance. Unfortunately, I believe that a standard based on "adequacy" will eventually lead us down that path, as the model by definition highlights funding levels rather than efficiency and innovation as the keystone to achievement.